

8-30-1996

## Resist Newsletter, July-Aug 1996

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### Recommended Citation

Resist, "Resist Newsletter, July-Aug 1996" (1996). *Resist Newsletters*. 284.  
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*Funding Social Change Since 1967*

# RESIST

ISSN 0897-2613 • Vol. 5 #6

*A Call to Resist Illegitimate Authority*

July/August 1996

## Art, Politics, and the Imagination

JEAN CAIANI

*Americans have an obsession with facts, and we know far too many facts about our fellow countrymen, facts that have eroded other kinds of knowledge, withered our imaginative faculty, our power to emotionally identify, magically transport ourselves as art does beneath another's skin.*

— John Edgar Wideman, "Dead Black Men,"  
*Esquire Magazine*, 1992

*We hear despair in the loss of vitality in our spoken language: "No problem," we say, "that was a healing experience," we say, "thank you for sharing that," we say. We see despair in the political activist who doggedly goes on and on, turning in the ashes of the same burnt out rhetoric, the same gestures, all imagination spent. Despair, when not the response to absolute physical and moral defeat, is, like war, the failure of the imagination.*

— Adrienne Rich, *What is Found There: Notebooks on Poetry and Politics*, 1993

Over the past few years I have worked with many activists who are questioning previous assumptions about organizing. I have reflected on the significance of the most often heard query, the despair in the talk of the activists Adrienne Rich refers to: "The speaker (event, march, demonstration) was great! What do we do now?" Why do the individual events we are constantly planning not go anywhere? How do we connect them to create a Movement? I continually ask myself, How do we let people move more closely between the issues and lived experience? How do we face alienation as part of the "commodity structure" affecting all social relations over such a long time? We evaluate our work by asking: how many, how fast, how much, equating activism primarily with good planning. Indeed we have become superior planners. The repetitive nature of working this way finally becomes merely mechanical, therefore, rigid, static, inert. Unfortunately, planning based solely on form squeezes and imprisons human sensibility.

The kind of identification John Edgar Wideman refers to is critical if we are to create a culture in which we learn to work together to end racism, to change attitudes toward women, gays and lesbians, to create a safe and healthy environment, and to work toward an economy which truly addresses human needs. Clearly connecting with each other and with our work is extremely subtle, extremely difficult to sustain, because the dominating forces defining "progress" in our society preclude it.

Wideman sheds light on the activist's commonly heard frustration: preoccupation with facts which give us "false comfort." In turn, our reliance of facts "has nurtured a pathological separation from reality. . . . The peculiar and perhaps fatal American violence is the refusal to connect. We simplify the world with categorical divisions and then cling to these in spite of the evidence of our intellects, our senses."

Scientific, analytical thinking presides as the dominating force for most organizing, adopted by progressives and conservatives alike. Most of us have grown up

believing that reading novels, watching films, attending plays and dance performances, looking at photographs and reading poetry are nothing more than forms of entertainment. Instead, they can be a search for truth, for a deeper understanding of people and the world. We're misled in thinking art is optional: great, valuable, entertaining, excellent, but off to one side of political, economic and legal thought.

Art has been used in many ways to encourage, enhance, illustrate and support political thinking and action. Such uses abound: graphic art and cartoons in journals, on banners and leaflets; street and "guerrilla" theater; poetry, mime and music at demonstrations and rallies. And, of course, documentary films dramatize issues and provide sources for analysis. Equally important, novels and short stories with immediate, overt political content have historically been of considerable aid to political people. These continue to be some of the most widely used and easily understood applications of art to political causes.

*continued on page two*



*continued from page one*

However, without demeaning such practical use of these art forms, progressives also need to encourage a less obvious, more organic use of art. All forms of art serve a purpose more compelling than mere entertainment. Art is more than a "tool"

primarily as inventing something new, akin to advertising. Create-a-card at your local Walgreen's becomes a perfect example. Such a short-sighted view trivializes both our imagination and our issues. But the artist's use of her or his imagination is both deeper and more complex. If we want to

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## All forms of art serve a purpose more compelling than mere entertainment; art is a vital ingredient in society's political discourse.

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used to serve the "cause." Instead, it is a vital ingredient in society's political discourse. As novelist Toni Morrison says, "The narrative has never been merely entertainment for me. It is, I believe, one of the principal ways in which we absorb knowledge."

As Wideman and Morrison tell us, art helps us to absorb knowledge, to grasp the world by widening and deepening our imaginative faculties. The work of the artist: the novelist, poet, photographer, dancer, filmmaker helps exercise the imagination which has become impoverished from only a utilitarian understanding of what is really a rich and complex faculty. It is this imagination the artist opens to possible change, both private and public.

In *Poetic Justice: The Literary Imagination and Public Life*, Martha Nussbaum discusses Rousseau's awareness of the importance of the imagination in making us human. The imagination is essential to enliven our capacity for finding connections, drawing inferences and solving problems. Only direct, immediate experience aided by careful imagination allows us to interpret, thereby bringing about the clear contrast and comparison without which no real choice can follow.

The imaginative ability to empathize with the way other people live has been slowly deteriorating throughout twentieth century life in the United States. A majority of people in public life think the only satisfactory engagement with the world should be a technological one. We have been educated to think of the imagination

think intelligently about welfare reform, crime, abortion, immigration, affirmative action and such issues, then we must be able to imagine how social, economic and political policy will harm or help the people who will be affected. To be able to interpret the ways these policies determine the lives of people, the land, the world—all this is a necessity. It is Art—music, dance, poetry, novels, films—which releases the creative impulse, the impulse to understand, to connect with each other.

A passage from Toni Morrison's *Be-loved*, a novel for which she won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1993, illustrates how the narrative can make this connection. The novel is set in the American South of the 1860s and its consciousness develops in the world of slaves and slavery before, during and after the Civil War.

*Eighteen seventy-four and whitefolks were still on the loose. Whole towns wiped clean of negroes; eighty-seven lynchings in one year alone in Kentucky; four colored schools burned to the ground; grown men whipped like children; children whipped like adults, black women raped by the crew; property taken, necks broken. He smelled skin, skin and hot blood. The skin was one thing, but human blood cooked in a lynch fire was a whole other thing. The stench stank. Stank up off the pages of the North Star, out of the mouths of witnesses, etched in crooked handwriting in letters delivered by hand. Detailed in documents and petitions full of whereas and presented to any legal*

*body who'd read it, it stank. But none of that had worn out his marrow. None of that. It was the ribbon. Tying his flatbed up on the bank of the Licking River, securing it the best he could, he caught sight of something red on its bottom. Reaching for it, he thought it was a cardinal feather stuck to his boat. He tugged and what came loose in his hand was a red ribbon knotted around a curl of wet woolly hair, clinging still to its bit of scalp. He untied the ribbon and put it in his pocket, dropped the curl in the weeds. On the way home, he stopped, short of breath and dizzy. He waited until the spell passed before continuing on his way. A moment later, his breath left him again. This time he sat down by a fence. Rested, he got to his feet, but before he took a step he turned to look back down the road he was traveling and said, to its frozen mud and the river beyond, "What are these people? You tell me, Jesus. What are they?"*

I learned more about the living experience of slavery from this novel than from



*Funding social change since 1967*

For information and grant guidelines, write to: RESIST, One Summer St., Somerville, MA 02143

Resist Newsletter is published ten times a year by RESIST, Inc., One Summer Street, Somerville, MA 02143 (617)623-5110. The views expressed in articles, other than editorials, are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the opinions of the RESIST staff or board.

RESIST Staff: Robin Carton  
Carol Schachet

Newsletter Editor: Carol Schachet  
Printing: Red Sun Press

Printed on Recycled Paper





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## Art moves us, sometimes indirectly, towards becoming self-conscious. Stories can transform the self in the act of identifying with someone different from ourselves.

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all my topical books, articles, political analyses. What is it about the novel, about fiction which makes this connection possible? Toni Morrison's characters in *Be-loved* come alive to the reader, her vivid language and imagery draw us into their lives, pulling us under their skin so as to connect us immediately to their experience. The images created through language in *Be-loved* bring alive a world the reader will never forget.

How often after reading a novel, a poem, a short story, have you asked yourself, how alike I am to everyone else, instead of, how different I am from everybody else? Vanessa Redgrave speaks to this identification directly in her autobiography when she says, "I began to read from Armenian poet, Gevorg Emin, and I could not stop, horrified by my ignorance and thrilled by the sense of discovery that comes when another human being opens your eyes and ears, telling you what you did not know and revealing that what you thought you knew amounted to very little. What exhilaration, what excitement, when you read a poem and think 'I am not alone.'"

Art moves us, sometimes indirectly, towards becoming self-conscious. Stories can transform the self, not just by the act of reading or listening to someone read, but in the act of identifying with someone different from ourselves. In *Be-loved* the reader not only knows something about slavery, but you, the reader, discover something about yourself, a depth of compassion, a desire to live life more fully.

In contrast to stories told in a living language filled with images taken from the human world, facts, statistics, data and bits of information, valuable as they are, slide in and out of memory without fully engaging sustained, powerful connections to the whole being. Data are important, are necessary, but not all by themselves, not alone. Analysis and facts are not able to give a face, eyes, a body to the suffering, joy, love,

anguish of the people (however near or far away). I think of Toni Morrison again and again, her words from a talk given to students in Cambridge, Massachusetts, "Data is not wisdom, is not knowledge."

Art, I am convinced (as indeed have been many scientists like Pascal and Einstein), is at least as necessary as the sciences in grasping reality if we are ever to effect the change we seek in our long struggle to be human. The imagination, nourished by art, has long been neglected, but increasingly so, as Wideman suggests, in the late twentieth century. Our efforts to make a better world through a narrow, reductive, isolated, scientific method which relies on the accumulation of data and its business-like interpretation, will fail. Let us bring art to our studies.

Another example illustrating art's way of leading through language to making human connections is the following selected poem from Chilean poet, Marjorie Agosin. She is writing about the experi-

and images of the courage and suffering of these women. Listen to her vivid language. Think on the images she uses, all from the living world.

*The kerchiefs that they tie, that are untied, madly whistle, kiss and moan. Give me a kerchief against injustice, give me a hand to stretch out so I may become a solitary lament that covers you. Give me a kerchief against injustice, so that I may be a remnant of an absence, so that I will not be a foreigner of maimed bones. I want a kerchief against injustice so I can cover you, dance with you on the winged banners of peace, fill you up with caresses, and make you dream about a memory of your body very close to mine, as if we were two joining fountainheads.*

Accompanying these poems in *Circles of Madness* is the powerful art of Alicia D'Amico and Alicia Sanguinetti. Of the photos Agosin writes:

*The photographs stopped being a means of generating hallucination or mere signs that record the seasons of feeble times. They existed as witnesses to the immediacy of history. . . . These photographs are like extensions of the missing; each snapshot represents an absent body, a body that doesn't judge or even identify the guilty. . . . The Mothers in one photograph form a fan of light; they are in the Plaza de Mayo in all the corrupt splendor of its rulers. In*

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## The work of our best artists throws into sharp relief what is painfully missing from most activists work: a fusion of living experience with political insight.

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ence of the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo. These are the Mothers of the Disappeared in Argentina, former middle class housewives who took to the streets twenty years ago after their children, husbands, wives, sisters and brothers, 10,000 people in total, were disappeared by the military dictatorship of Argentina. Every week for twenty years these mothers have marched in the famous Plaza demanding to know the whereabouts of their loved ones. Agosin's poems are fragments, homages, threads

*yet another photo, we see one of them, alone, very lonely, sitting at a marble table, waiting for her missing with a glass of water, with a flower, and with a lot of light. . . . The photographs of Alicia D'Amato and Alicia Sanguinetti act both as instruments and as an approach to knowledge that makes us remember that personae go beyond masks. . . . They capture both the beauty and monstrosity, and register them*

*continued on page eleven*



# Painting Across Borders:

## *Labor Arts Mural Project in Mexico and the U.S.*

ROBIN ALEXANDER

The Pittsburgh-based United Electrical, Radio & Machine Workers of America (UE) unites a diverse membership on the basis of working together in a democratic, rank and file union. The same principles of solidarity and democracy have joined UE and a Mexican labor federation, the Frente Autentico del Trabajo (FAT) in a unique, collaborative venture, including cross-border art initiatives.

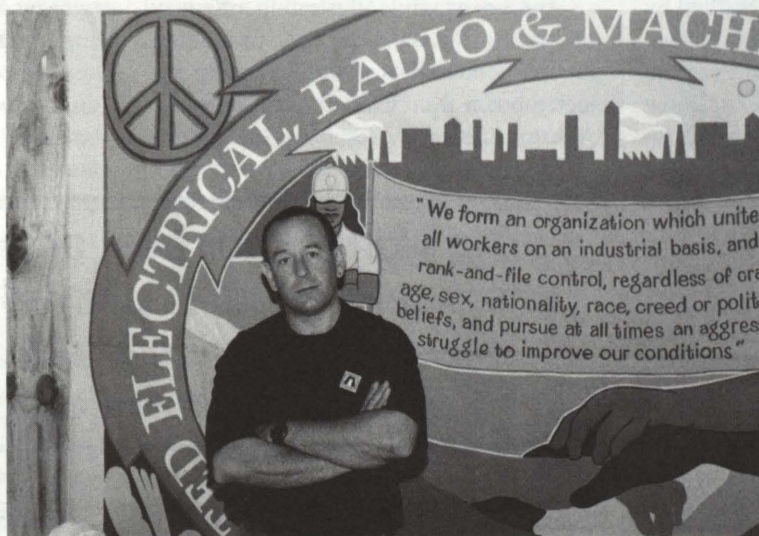
The FAT, an independent federation of Mexican labor unions, worker-owned cooperatives, farm worker and community organizations, now represents workers in more than half the states of Mexico. The FAT represents manufacturing industries including textiles, garment, shoemaking, rubber, and auto parts, as well as in agriculture and construction. Although modest in size, the FAT has an influence which greatly exceeds its size due to its principled determination to create independent, democratic unions under extremely adverse conditions.

The UE-FAT Strategic Organizing Alliance is an effort to build a new kind of international solidarity focused on organizing. The FAT and its affiliated unions are working to develop democratic, independent unions in Mexico; the UE, numerous individuals, and other unions are providing support for this work in a variety of ways. This year has brought our work to new levels with a number of exciting projects which illustrate our commitment to exploring new approaches founded on a grass roots perspective. Our biggest accomplishment of the year thus far is the

establishment of a workers' center in the Mexican border town of Ciudad Juarez. The center opened its doors in June and will host a formal inauguration this fall.



Labor muralist Mike Alowitz designed and completed this banner in 1995 in Burlington, VT, for the 60th Convention of the UE.



The UE and FAT will also be organizing and hosting an exchange of delegations of women. The UE delegation, which travels to Mexico in August, will be drawn from each of UE's districts. The FAT delegation will include representatives from both the union and cooperative sectors and is scheduled to visit Boston, Cleveland, Erie, Milwaukee, Minneapolis, and Pittsburgh.

Oregon is a possible destination as well.

Perhaps the most innovative project currently under way links art and politics. With seed money provided by a RESIST grant, labor muralist Mike Alowitz from New Jersey and community muralist Daniel Manrique from Mexico City will be working together on murals in Mexico City and Chicago with a common theme of cross-border labor solidarity. The Chicago Public Art Group will also be participating in this project.

In addition, a number of community groups in Chicago have been inspired by this project to start talking about the creation of community murals and other events which would focus on some of the problems facing workers and the Latino communities in Chicago.

The guiding principles and ideas behind the mural project are best described by the artists themselves.

**Daniel Manrique, in a letter to Mike Alowitz, describes how he became a community artist:**

My family which was very poor, but truly very poor, both material and spiritual poverty, never understood what it is to be an artist, and far less what it is to be a painter. It was unimportant to my family what I dedicated myself to do; the only important thing was that I should bring in money with which to eat.

As a natural instinct, my posture as an artist was almost my first act of rebellion. While my family

said: do *whatever* you want, but eating is primary, I said: I would die of hunger before doing something only in order to eat. At that time I was 21 years old.

In the art school—and on top of everything my attendance was at night—I more or less understood the differences that exist in painting. But my true knowledge was obtained when I painted



murals on the walls of *Tepito* (my neighborhood). In some places I asked permission to paint. Rather than try to obtain "contracts" to paint murals, rather than try to "charge" for painting murals, I asked permission to paint. Many people from the neighborhood refused and told me that I was crazy, but others accepted, although they told me that they had no money with which to pay me, and I told them that I was not charging them anything. An emotional, but also intellectual, conflict began to be born within me when people asked me why I did not charge for my work. Why should I paint in the neighborhood, where nobody can pay me? Nobody understands why I don't paint pretty pictures and sell them to rich people who can pay me and can "understand" me.

My conflict was that I asked myself: What do I tell them? How do I tell them that the rich, the "bourgeoisie" do not like me, are not interested in my painting. Juggling words I explained that I was doing an artistic experiment and because of that nobody had to pay because at least here in Mexico, and beyond that who knows where, nobody pays for artistic experiments. I told them: I want to know what will happen when art is out in the streets. Many people began to invite me to paint, they gave me paint, they loaned me ladders, they invited me to eat, and sometimes they gave me money.

**On the U.S. side, Mike Alewitz describes the significance of the cross-border mural project:**

We face a crisis that transcends international politics: it is economic, political and it reaches to the very soul of

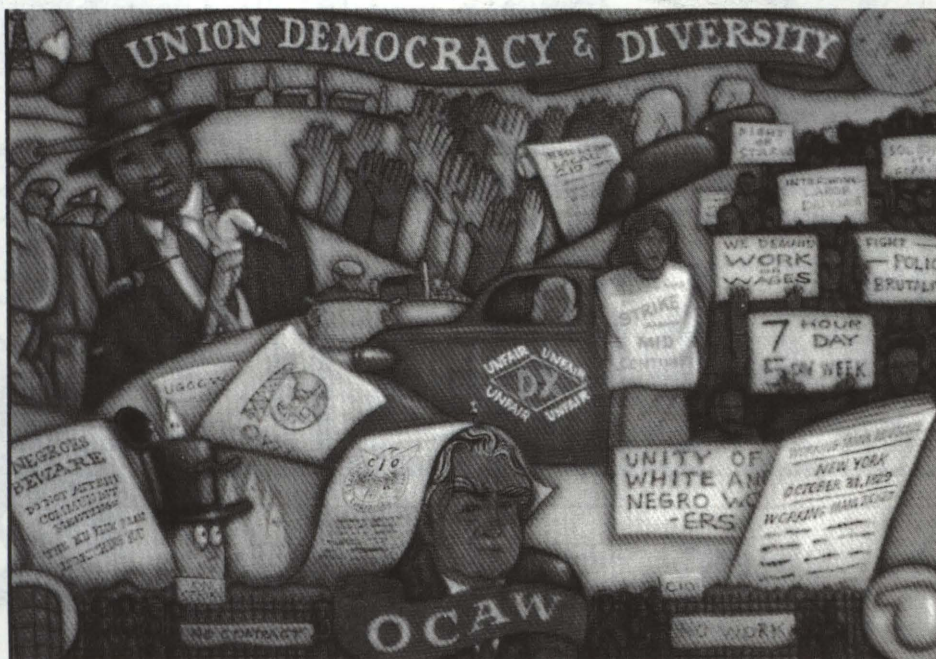
our culture. Through their cross-border initiative, the Strategic Organizing Alliance, the UE and FAT are creating an important model for international solidarity. It is an example that can be studied, evaluated and built upon by other labor organizations.

By creating a cultural project to illustrate this initiative we not only are

inspire further political activity.

We live in a time of cultural pessimism. The upper and middle classes claim that today's art is of historic quality. In contrast, I believe it to be truly decadent, not in a prurient but in a political sense. The working class needs to sing and to paint. We need both an economic program to combat the economic

devastation caused by the trans-nationals and a cultural life that provides inspiration and joy. I believe that it is possible to create art that embodies the optimism of a time when workers will control their own destinies and we will have a world where peace, justice, and economic well-being are our priorities.



This panel, painted in 1993, is part of a portable mural depicting the history of the Oil, Chemical, and Atomic Workers International Union (OCAW). Mural by Mike Alewitz

publicizing a concrete political action for today, we are illuminating the future. Workers are not merely consumers of the image on the wall, but together with their communities will be raising their own local concerns and demands at the time the murals are painted, and in this way the painting and community action will

received a Resist grant in 1996. Additional funding is still needed with hopes to begin painting the murals in the spring. For more information about the project, contact Robin Alexander, UE, 2400 Oliver Building, 535 Smithfield Street, Pittsburgh, PA 15222.



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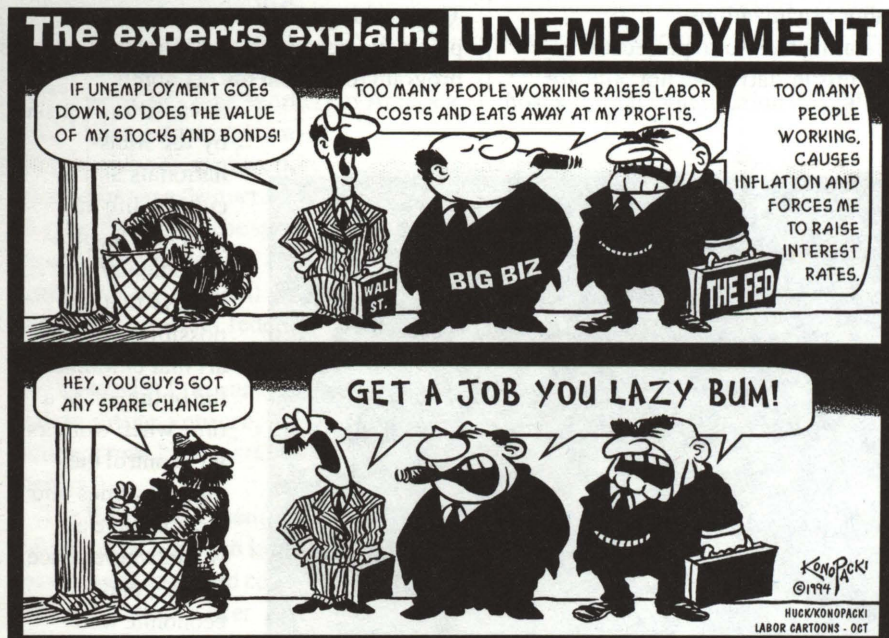
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# Animating Change

CARTOONS BY FRED WRIGHT, GARY HUCK,  
AND MIKE KONOPACKI



## Art in the Movement

GARY HUCK

Fred Wright and the UE (United, Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America) defined the relationship between art and politics in the U.S. labor movement.

Fred Wright quit his job as cartoonist for the Maritime Union in 1949 because he was being asked to draw red-baiting cartoons as part of the "Red Scare" spreading across the U.S. Fred went to work for UE, a left-led CIO union that was itself being, of course, red-baited.

In the *UE News*, on pamphlets, picket signs, leaflets and posters, Fred's cartoons defined, documented, challenged, and combated the attacks from corporate and government forces during the Red Scare. His cartoons fought off raids by other unions, organized new workers and gave vision to a progressive political agenda. Until his death in 1984, Fred almost singlehandedly supplied the labor movement in the United States with cartoons that so defined working class life and are so timeless that they continue to organize workers and promote social causes around the world today.

Now my computer sits on Fred Wright's old drawing table where I work as the only full-time

cartoonist in the labor movement. One moment I might be colorizing my cartoon for the front page of the next *UE News*; or talking with a colleague about a t-shirt I've designed for a delegation of visiting women workers from Mexico. Or I might be talking on the phone with Mike Konopacki, my partner and brother in our labor cartooning syndication since 1983, about our next package of cartoons going out to labor editors all over the country, and about how well his comic book on the World Bank (commissioned by a group of European unions) is doing, and about the work we'll be doing on the first edition of the national paper for the new Labor Party, and about how we're looking forward to designing a WEB site along with muralist Mike Alewitz.

In the midst of all this activity, one big cartoon that Fred Wright drew animates us all. The caption reads: The art is in the movement and the movement is in the art.

*Gary Huck works as a cartoonist for the United, Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America and has published several books of cartoons.*

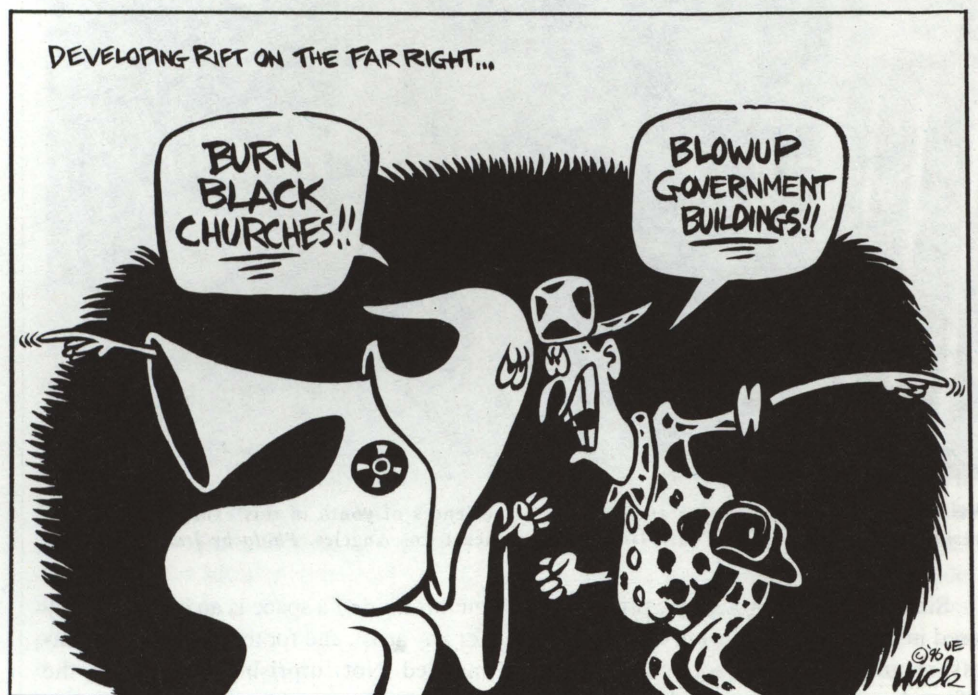
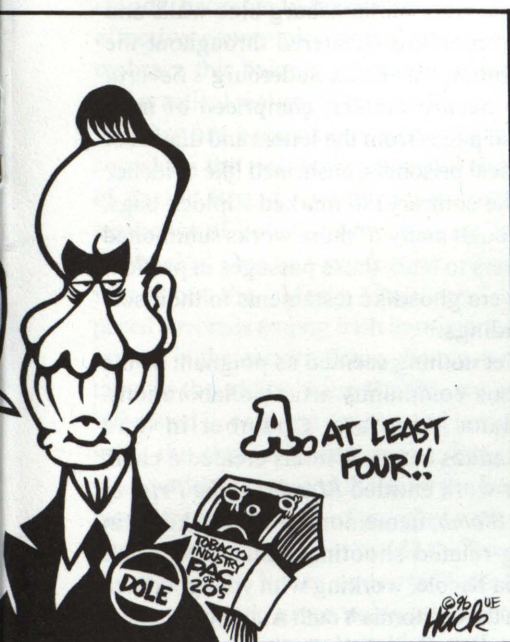
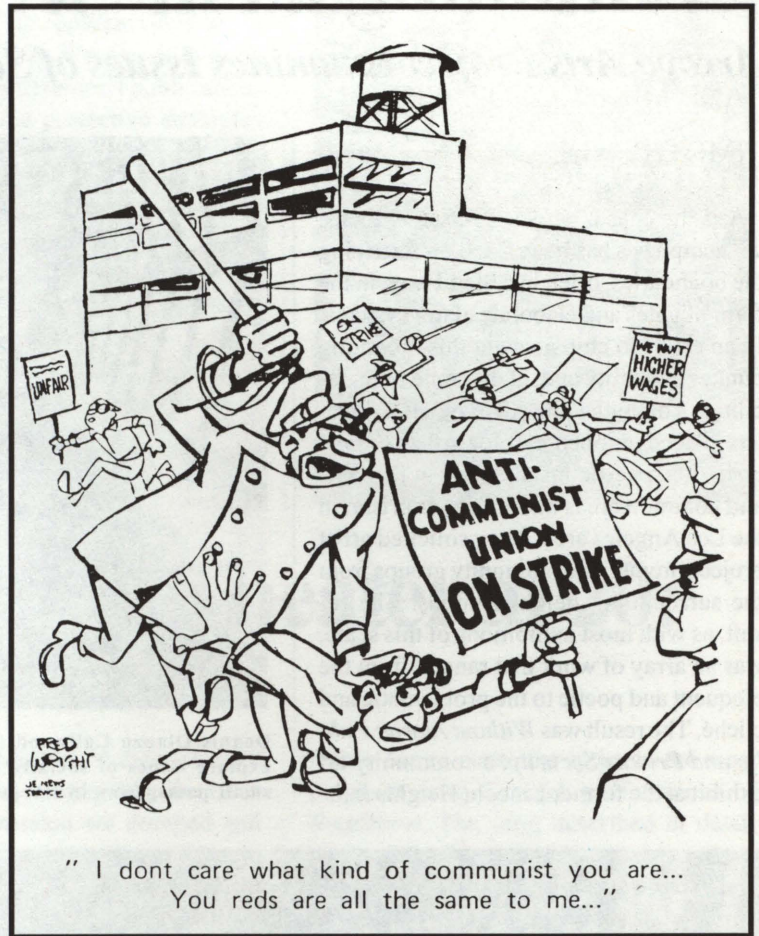
Q HOW MANY YEARS DO CIGARETTES TAKE OFF YOUR LIFE? 6000

BOB DOLE DOESN'T THINK TOBACCO IS ADDICTIVE.





UE News Service



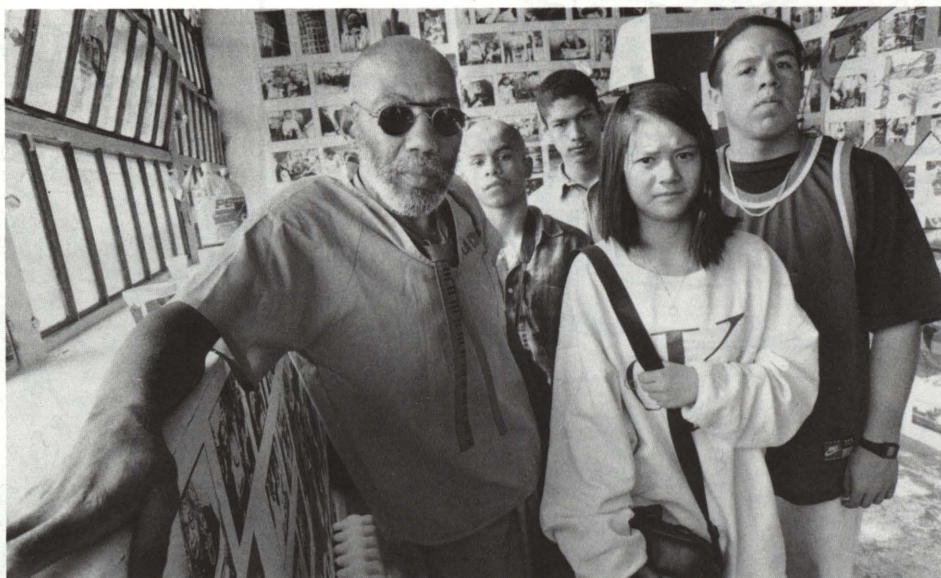


# “Without Alarm” a Shocking Success:

## *Arroyo Arts Project Examines Issues of Security*

TIMOTHY NOLAN

As the chasm between classes widens, emphasis has been fixed on fortifying the boundaries, often in a literal way, in the form of gates and elaborate alarm systems. In an effort to chip away at this mounting bunker mentality and, at the same time, facilitate a dialogue, the Arroyo Arts Collective placed an open call for artists to propose site-specific installations in the cells and common areas of the former prison in the Los Angeles area. They solicited artist projects involving community groups from the surrounding neighborhoods. The result, as with most exhibitions of this scale, was an array of work that ranged from the eloquent and poetic to the problematic and cliché. The result was *Without Alarm: Public and Private Security*, a community art exhibit at the former Lincoln Heights Jail.



Dennis Olanzo Callwood (left) worked with students from Lincoln High School to explore issues of socially constructed identity and self image in this exhibition in a small passageway in the jail. Photo by Irene Fertik



Visitors to *Without Alarm* see and hear the experiences of youth in this exhibit from residents of the Optimist Youth Homes in Northeast Los Angeles. Photo by Irene Fertik

Simply walking through the prison, last used in the late 1960s during the Watts riots, is quite moving. Traces of its former life and residents are everywhere. To take

on this kind of a space is an act of bravery for any artist, and for that all must be commended. Not surprisingly, however, the most effective works were those that con-

sidered the site as an integral element. In *Past Present*, for example, Inka Bujalski lined a hallway with wall rubbings taken from the second floor. Others used the cells as foils to the world outside, as in Jack Richardson's *The Color of my Dreams*, in which one cramped chamber was transformed into a stately Federal-style room replete with Williamsburg blue walls and white molding. Scattered throughout the exhibition was Erika Suderburg's *Several Very Secure Letters*, comprised of individual pages from the letters and diaries of political prisoners, enshrined like evidence (to the contrary) in marked Ziplock bags. Although many of these works summoned viewers to read, those passages in particular were ghostlike testaments to their surroundings.

Yet nothing seemed as poignant as the various community/artist collaborations. Vibiana Aparicio Chamberlin and Chicanitas contra Pistolas created a chalk floor work entitled *Blessed is the Fruit of Our Womb*, in memory of friends killed in gang-related shootings. Susan Hill and Lydia Nicole, working with young women from the California Youth Authority Ventura School/Charter Oaks Project, gave voices and faces to inmates by working with in-



carcerated mothers on both a video and banners that detailed their dreams and aspirations. These real life experiences underscored the urgency of the issues in *Without Alarm*, primarily the failure of our penal system to address the root causes of crime, which in turn perpetuates cycles of crime and poverty within the community at large.

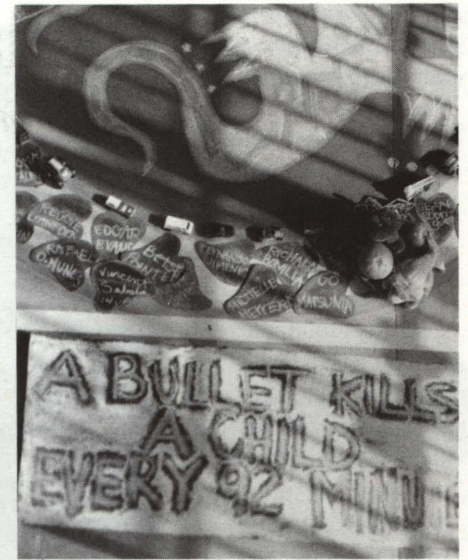
*Without Alarm* provided a forum for addressing these issues in a humane way—a very genuine need, considering the manner in which a bloodthirsty media presents them on the nightly news. It gave public expression to personal experience with violent crime and incarceration, memorialized victims without demonizing prisoners, and allowed viewers to glimpse not only the

inside of a prison, but also the intimate thoughts of those for whom institutional punishment and its repercussions are a firsthand fact of life. We can only hope that these efforts will redirect public attention away from the protective strategies and toward vital community-building.

*This article is reprinted with permission from Artweek, where it originally appeared in June 1996.*

Chicanitas contra Pistolas worked with artist Vibiana Aparicio Chamberlin to create a chalk floor mural in the form of a rosary. Each bead symbolized a child slain by violence.

*Photo by Vibiana Aparicio Chamberlin*



## Underground Railway Theater at 20: *Head In the Clouds, Backside In the Water*

DEBRA WISE

An anniversary is a great time to reflect. Looking back over the twenty-odd productions Underground Railway Theater (URT) has created and toured nationally, I am struck by how our theater's goals have been shaped by the goals of political organizing. I am also reminded of a phrase German playwright Bertolt Brecht used to describe one of his characters: "Head in the clouds, backside to the water." URT, like effective community organizers, tries to embrace this balance of healthy idealism and practical realism in our work.

Since our beginning, we have been inspired by the politically-engaged theater of Bertolt Brecht, and the actor-centered aesthetics of Polish theater director Jerzy Grotowski. Our first production, *Breaker* was about the "Molly Maguires," supposed terrorists among Irish immigrant coal miners in the eastern Pennsylvania mountains in the 1870s. Like Brecht, we were interested in working people, and in examining the choices people make. But, like Grotowski, we wanted the actors to be engaged in the creation of the play from the beginning, trying to get inside the lives of the miners, to better understand the impulses of people given no recourse for organizing on their own behalf. We all went to Pennsylvania and interviewed the de-

scendants of the Mollies. In fact, we were so committed to re-creating their lives that during the intermission we dumped and shoveled a ton of coal, prompting some in the audience to complain of coal dust in their noses.

What was traditional about this production, however, was where it was performed, and for whom: in a theater, for a general audience. Our theater work matured when our third inspiration took hold: movements for social change. That meant that the form, content, and presentation of our work began to be shaped by what we thought would be most useful to our colleagues in organizing. I've tried to highlight below the goals that began to emerge, and that continue to guide us.

The *Anything Can Happen Roadshow* opened in 1981, near the time of the million-strong disarmament march in New York. We endeavored to create a play to help our audiences do what we ourselves were trying to do: understand the politics of the arms race and imagine the impact of a nuclear war. We chose to construct a comedy because that seemed a good way to present information about such a horrendous topic. As Moliere was fond of saying, when people laugh, their brains temporarily open and a few ideas can be nailed in before they close again.

In order to invite imagining the unimag-

inable, we re-wrote the lyrics to the most poignant song for each performance of *Roadshow*. The song described in detail the impact of a nuclear holocaust, and we used a litany of place names local to wherever we were. We offered the show to organizers, who each had different goals. Some wanted to spread the word, so we played in schools, churches and parks. Some wanted to give courage to those who were afraid to become involved; I remember when we played in Alabama, hearing of a man who was afraid to support the freeze movement because he thought Reagan would cut off his pension. Somehow coming to the *Roadshow* helped him to "come out" as a pacifist.

*Sanctuary - The Spirit of Harriet Tubman* was our 10th anniversary production. We wanted to make a play about our namesake, but we also wanted to relate it to contemporary issues. We were struck by the similarities between the underground railroad of the 1850s and the Central American Sanctuary movement of the 1980s. We wanted to make connections in order to, as Brecht would say, "make the strange familiar, and the familiar strange." Two stories were presented side-by-side, with the actress playing Tubman in the first act becoming a Chicago cook in the second act, helping a Guatemalan refugee (a

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dishwasher in the same kitchen) escape the INS. The power of the play was its ability to build bridges between people; we were often presented by partnerships between Black community groups and a Central American solidarity group. We performed with a local gospel choir wherever we went. The style of the show was epic, combining song and puppetry to celebrate cultures of resistance, so rich in both the African American and Central American traditions.

*Home Is Where* was created in the late 1980s, at a time when the problem of homelessness was reaching epidemic proportions. We wanted to go beyond documenting the problem, to explore the root causes of homelessness and to examine the alternatives. The concepts of private property and individualism are so embedded in our political culture that we felt it would be empowering to see a diverse group of people struggling through their differences to both form a community and create an unusual (no-equity, cooperatively-owned) housing solution for themselves. Given the nature of this subject, however, we chose a tragedy: before their success, a central character dies in a squatting action. This play's usefulness, we felt, was its ability to relate economic systems to people's lives, and to show the human cost of our political decisions. Our sponsors were housing advocates, who most often used the play to form new alliances. In one town in Illinois, for instance, a bank hesitant to invest in affordable housing nevertheless underwrote the play's performance there; once the bank representatives saw the show and had more personal contact with the organizers, they changed their policy.

*The Christopher Columbus Follies* toured in 1992; we felt morally obligated to respond to the quincentennial of Columbus' "discovery." We needed to examine the legacy of our history to enable us to better understand our present. And since



Performers from the production of *Sanctuary - The Spirit of Harriet Tubman*. Photo by Ken Bruno

we wanted to do this from every possible angle, we chose cabaret. *The Follies* became our first eco-cabaret, in fact, because we quickly came to the conclusion that we needed to make connections between social justice and environmental problems, which we are continuing to do in *InTOXICating*, our current eco-cabaret about environmental justice. Cabaret allows us to slam from comedy to drama, and to include the voices of real people and celebrate their efforts; the research for

*InTOXICating* included interviews with scores of grassroots activists.

Our more recent works feature voices of people in our communities. *Washed-Up Middle-Aged Women*, for instance, is based on interviews with scores of women who are anything but washed-up, but who are all facing the challenges of mid-life; our intent is to build community among people too often isolated from each other.

In *Twisted Figures*, which premieres this October, we are struggling to create a piece which reveals how the media affect us, even when we are not looking at the media. The final image, admittedly apocalyptic, is of four "friends" mesmerized in front of a television, caught in its light, having lost the capacity to move either away from the TV or toward each other. Our audiences will get the last word, since we end the play with excerpts from interviews with people about their own "media histories," and open the play up to an exchange of views.

Perhaps that is the central objective shared by both politically-engaged artists and community organizers: to assure that everyone, even in our mediatized culture, has a right to a name, a song, and a story. We need to work together to assure that we continue in a spirit of celebration to assure that that right is never lost.

*Debra Wise is co-director of the Underground Railway Theater. URT has received several Resist grants over the years, including in one 1996.*



Underground Railway Theater's current production is *Twisted Figures*, addressing issues of media and violence. Photo by David Fichter



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*without sentimentality or shock but with a wisdom that is immense and diaphanous.*

A final example of using imagination's way of clarifying our world, presenting us with genuine hope and courage, are the vignettes, stories of fantasy, from Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano's book, *The Book of Embraces*. When asked about the purpose of fantasy in literature he tells us "Fantasy announces another possible world, it is not an escape from reality or refusing reality, rather announcing another possible reality." In *Celebration of Contradictions* he elaborates:

*Turn loose the voices, undream the dreams. Through my writing, I try to express the magical reality, which I find at the core of the hideous reality of America.*

*In these countries, the god Elegguá carries death in the nape of his neck and life in his face. Every promise is a threat, every loss a discovery. Courage is born of fear, certainty of doubt. Dreams announce the possibility of another reality, and out of delirium emerges another kind of reason.*

*What it all comes down to is that we are the sum of our efforts to change who we are. Identity is no museum piece sitting stock-still in a display case, but rather the endlessly astonishing synthesis of the contradictions of everyday life. I believe in that fugitive faith. It seems to me the only faith worthy of belief for its great likeness to the human animal, accursed yet holy, and to the mad adventure that is living in this world.*

Fantasy as understood by the most memorable artists is not escapist, drawing the reader away from reality, but rather pulling her or him deeper into it. All good art is disturbing in ways that history, social science and government accounting office writing is not. It inspires distrust of conventional pieties and exacts a frequently painful confrontation with one's own thoughts and intentions. One may be told many things about people in one's own society, yet keeping that knowledge at a distance. Literary works that promote identification and emotional reaction cut through those self-protective stratagems, requiring us to see and to respond to many truths difficult to confront — and they make the process even agreeable by giving us

pleasure in the very act of confrontation. Only then will all our facts and analyses prove truly useful.

The work of our best artists throws into sharp relief what is painfully missing from most activists' work: a fusion of living experience with political insight. We cannot recapture this closeness to life, to finding new ways of bringing to life the good materials of our analysts, researchers and po-

litical writers until we consciously change our organizing methods. Until we draw ourselves closer to undermining our present reified world.

*Jean Caiani is the founder and director of Speak Out, the nation's only national not-for-profit progressive speakers and artists agency committed to social, economic and political change.*

## GRANTS

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### **Anpo Native American Cultural Organization and Encampment**

P.O. Box 42608

Portland, OR 97242

Anpo, from the Lakota meaning "Day-break" or "A New Beginning," was founded in 1976 after Wounded Knee in the Mt. Hood National Forest. The organizations goals were to provide Native American people with a deeper understanding of their heritage and spiritual values, and a chance to actively participate in the culture. The Anpo community and camp have sponsored gatherings, speakers, workshops, youth camps and ceremonies for 3 generations. In 1995, the Forest Service began a series of archeological digs throughout the camp and ceremonial grounds, desecrating those areas. At this point, the Forest Service plans to engage in additional digs in the area and to build logging roads through the encampment.

A Resist grant of \$1,000 will go towards general support of the Anpo Community and will be utilized to oppose the construction of logging roads and archeological digs in the encampment.

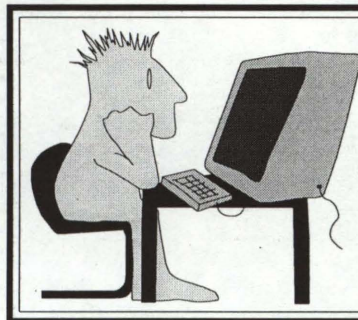
### **Nukewatch**

P.O. Box 2658

Madison, WI 53711

In 1979 the *Progressive* intended to expose the secrecy surrounding nuclear weapons by publishing a story entitled "The H-Bomb Secret: How We Got It-Why We're Telling It." A government restraining order temporarily forbade the magazine from publishing the piece, forcing a protracted legal battle. Out of this legal battle, a number of projects, including Nukewatch, were formed. Nukewatch remains dedicated to uncovering military secrets and informing the public.

Utilizing a \$1,000 grant from Resist, Nukewatch will sponsor the *Shadows on the Rock Peace Camp*, an 8-day resistance encampment organized to continue the struggle to stop Project ELF. Project ELF is a one-way Navy communication system designed to initiate first-strike action by Trident nuclear submarines. *Shadows on the Rock Peace Camp* commemorates the victims of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings and features speakers, workshops, nonviolent direct actions and nonviolence training.



*Resist would like to extend a special word of thanks to Steve Wishengrad for volunteering his time and computer expertise. Steve's dedication has been invaluable in updating our grants software and helping set up time-saving programs.*



# GRANTS

*In each issue of the Newsletter we highlight a few recent RESIST grants to groups throughout the United States. This month, we feature grants awarded at our June Board meeting. For more details about these grants, please write to the organizations themselves at the addresses listed below.*

## Seattle Public Theater

915 East Pine, Room 426  
Seattle, WA 98122

Seattle Public Theater bills themselves as "theater for a change." SPT creates performances and workshops using theater as a means of empowerment and transformation for individuals and society. Since its founding in 1988, SPT has created over 40 productions which have registered the audience to vote; involved them in workplace equity; explored questions of racism and prejudice; created a dialogue between homeless youth and the general public; and involved rural communities in timber issues. SPT's programs fall into two principal areas. First, the Touring Program offers professional performances of original humorous

musicals with audience interaction to examine issues of importance in the Northwest. Second, the Theater of Liberation (TOL) program offers theater workshops as an avenue to explore individual and community empowerment.

A Resist grant of \$1,000 will fund performances of *The Jane Show, Or How Do You Spell Democracy?* This play examines the current "health" of public participation in democratic decision-making.

## Abortion Rights Fund of Western Massachusetts

P.O. Box 732  
Hadley, MA 01035

The Abortion Rights Fund of Western Massachusetts formed in May of 1987 in response to specific immediate threats to reproductive freedom in Western Massachusetts. Members were concerned that there needed to be a more coherent organizational form in order to defend and expand reproductive rights. The Fund provides financial aid to women and an open referral system with a toll-free telephone number in the context of their ongoing work toward the elimination of the

ever-increasing barriers to reproductive freedom. The Fund has a political and educational agenda that includes advocating for the expansion of public health funding and abortion services, negotiating with providers for reduced fees and better quality of services, organizing outreach campaigns to inform women that financial assistance is available for abortion, and helping to educate young women about their rights and options.

With a Resist grant of \$900, the fund will send three organizers to the National Network of Abortion Funds' annual conference where local activists will be able to learn additional media, fund raising and organizing skills.

## Kensington Welfare Rights Union

P.O. Box 50678  
Philadelphia, PA 19133

Kensington Welfare Rights Union, established in 1991, supports the efforts of poor and homeless people to become leaders in the struggle to end poverty, and provides tools for low-income people to develop an analysis of socio-economic trends in our society. Although KWRU tries to work "within" the system to create change, they are also committed to direct confrontational action to achieve their goals. In 1992, KWRU attempted to convert an abandoned building into a community center through traditional means. When this proved unsuccessful, KWRU held a March Against Poverty through their community which ended up at the building. Six women then entered the building and reclaimed it as a community center. These women were arrested and charged with felonies, although they were later released. Within a week of these arrests, KWRU set up a Tent City within one block of the building.

Since 1992, KWRU has maintained the Tent City each summer to engage in outreach and organizing projects around the issues of poverty and housing in Philadelphia. Resist's grant of \$1,000 will help fund Tent City this summer.

## Join the RESIST Pledge Program

**We'd like you to consider becoming a RESIST Pledge.**

**Pledges account for over 25% of our income.**

By becoming a pledge, you help guarantee RESIST a fixed and dependable source of income on which we can build our grant-making program. In return, we will send you a monthly pledge letter and reminder along with your newsletter. We will keep you up-to-date on the groups we have funded and the other work being done at RESIST.

So take the plunge and become a RESIST Pledge! We count on you, and the groups we fund count on us.

Resist • One Summer Street • Somerville, MA 02143 • 617/623-5110

**Yes! I'll become a RESIST Pledge.**

I'll send you my pledge of \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
every month/two months/  
quarter/six months (circle one).

☐ Enclosed is initial pledge contribution of \$ \_\_\_\_\_.

☐ I can't join the pledge program now, but here's a contribution of \$ \_\_\_\_\_ to support your work.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

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